

## **AMERICAN BUSINESS PRACTICES & CULTURE**

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English has become the International Language for Business. In face-to-face business meetings many different languages are used. Writing English is the most popular language for business. Even if you cannot speak English well, you need to be able to read it. One reason is an increase in exports. Today most large corporations export their products all over the world. You have to include documentation with your products. It's not practical to translate this information into every language. English has become standard. In addition, businesses have become increasingly dependent on e-mail and Internet. The dominant language of the Internet is English. Finally, most of the important scientific and business journals are in English. If you want to keep up in business, you need to read English.

How to improve your communication in English? The first thing to do is to learn how to control the flow of a conversation. It means to get other people to speak more slowly. For example, you can say, "Could you speak more slowly, please?" And if you don't understand something, you can say, "I'm sorry, but I don't understand." Or, "Could you, please, say it again." If you don't understand a word, you can ask for help by saying, "What does that mean?" In business it's important to understand and confirm information and ideas. The worst thing to do is to pretend to understand when you really don't understand. So you should ask a lot of clarification questions. Finally, if you really want to learn English, keep studying!

How to make a good first impression when you meet Americans? It is important to greet Americans correctly. They expect a firm handshake. A firm handshake shows that you are confident. Most Americans expect good eye contact. When you greet someone, you should begin by looking him in the eyes for a second or two. Then look away to the chin or forehead for a few seconds. Good eye contact shows that you are interested, and actively

listening. Try to sit up straight, even if you are tired. If you want to seem intelligent, confident, and interested, these things are important.

How to begin a good working relationship if you have some important American visitors? First, you need to make your visitors feel comfortable. For example, don't talk about serious business at first. Welcome them, and introduce everyone in the group. You should then offer them some light refreshments, like coffee, or soft drink. Everyone should sit down together to get to know each other. At the beginning small talk is very important. You might ask them how their trip was, or you could say, "Is this the first time you have been in our city?" This is sometimes called "breaking the ice". When you first meet someone, the relationship can feel cold or icy. Try to create a warm relationship by making your visitors feel comfortable.

How should you introduce a colleague to an American? You have two responsibilities. First, you have to make sure that each person learns the other person's name and business title. That's the easy part because you can use standard language like, "Mary, I'd like you to meet Ben. Ben is our vice-president of marketing." But after you have introduced the two people, you should try to help them continue the conversation because when two people meet for the first time, they may not know what to say to each other. You can add some information that will help them start talking. For example, you can say, "Mary's just got back from Toronto." Then Ben can say, "How was your trip? How did you like Toronto?" So you help them to begin to make small talk. Small talk makes everyone very comfortable.

When should you stop small talk and get down to business?

Before discussing business, it's common to have small talk. These language functions are very important for successful communication in both business and social situations. In most situations, small talk should only last for a few minutes. When people have been introduced and are comfortable, you can start the serious conversation. But how do you know exactly when to begin talking about business? You should look at the other people in the room

very carefully. Sometimes you can see signs that it's time to end the small talk. For example, if people are looking at their watches, that's one sign, because they are wondering when the discussion will begin or they are bored. Another sign is the pause in the conversation or an awkward silence. After that you can say, "Well, perhaps, we should begin our meeting." Or you can say, "Why don't we get started?"

What is a negotiation?

Negotiation is a process by which people try to come to an agreement. An important part of any negotiation is making a suggestion. When you make a proposal, you say what you would like. If the other side doesn't like your proposal, then they usually make a counter proposal. A counter proposal is a new proposal, or a new suggestion. The two sides keep making suggestions until you both agree. If they can't agree, the negotiations break down. They fail. For example, let's say that you are selling your car for \$ 1,000. That's your proposal. I tell you that I'll pay \$500. That's my counterproposal. If you say that you'll accept \$800, I can accept your counter proposal, or make a new one.

How to Start Negotiations. The first important thing to do is to focus on common ground. Common ground is an interest which you both share. For example, you may want to buy a high quality piece of equipment from company X. They want to sell it. That's common ground. That is a good way to start. The second thing is to be very honest about any problems you see. For example, you may want to buy their product, but it may be too expensive. First, you can say that they have an excellent product, and then state your problem about the price. One thing you can say is, "There is no doubt that your product is excellent. However, the price is too high for us." After you have stated your position clearly, you have to encourage the other side to state their position clearly too. The best advice is to be honest at all times. Being honest will allow you to build long-term relationships. These relationships will help you in future negotiations.

Good negotiators want an agreement that is good for both sides. That is called a win-win solution, so negotiating can be different from playing a game when one person wins and the other person loses. How do you develop a good relationship? Try to understand what the other side needs. Find out everything that you can about the company. You should also get to know the people in the company. For example, arrive early at meetings to check about personal matters. Small talk is important. It can help to build trust. Finally, if possible, avoid short deadlines. It takes time to develop a good working relationship, and good agreements are based on good relationships. When you negotiate, it is very helpful to understand the reasons behind the other person's position. If you understand why a person wants something, you can look for a solution that both of you can accept. For example, if I want to go to an Italian restaurant and you want to go to a seafood restaurant, we are taking different positions. We want to go to different restaurants. But, if the reason I want to go to an Italian restaurant is because I like spaghetti, you may know a seafood restaurant that has great spaghetti. And if I want to go to a seafood restaurant because I love shrimp, you may know an Italian restaurant that has shrimp. What we wanted was different, but once we understand why we wanted it, we were closer to finding a solution.

Here are some general suggestions for negotiations.

First of all, you have to remember that you are building a strong relationship. You should make sure that your agreement is fair to both sides. To do this, you really need to know what the other side wants and needs. You need to understand what they are asking for and why. And it's very important to understand a proposal before reacting to it. You should always paraphrase ideas to check your understanding. Finally, always ask where the numbers come from and check them.

What is a good way to end a conversation?

In English there are a number of expressions you can use to bring a conversation to a close. These expressions will tell the other person that the

conversation will end soon. At the end of the conversation, after a pause, you can say, "Well, it's been nice talking to you!" to bring the conversation to a close. Before you say good-bye, you can use several preclosing expressions. A very common form of preclosing is to send greetings to other people such as spouses, or co-workers." For example, "I'm really glad I ran into you. Say hello to your wife! And, please tell Mary that I'll call her tomorrow about 10." "Have a nice day!" or "Have a good trip!" are also sometimes used at the end of a conversation. At the end of the phone conversation we can use other expressions to close conversations before you say good-bye. For example, "Well, let's keep in touch! Thanks for calling. Good luck with your job!" These expressions are a friendly way to prepare for the end of a conversation before you say good-bye.

Business etiquette in the US is very similar to the Belarussian behavior at the meeting, but it has some peculiarities. In order to get in touch with foreign partners or clients, we have to follow these very important rules.